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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

Title: Plants and the proposed EC Habitats Directive

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Source: Edmondson, J. (1990). Plants and the proposed EC Habitats Directive. *Biology Curators Group Newsletter*, Vol 5 No 6, 65.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/951>

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for generously giving their time and efforts. We hope they enjoyed it as much as we did.

(PS A special mention should be made of Derek Whiteley, thanks to whom we need no longer fear genitalia.)

Steven Thompson
Clitheroe Museum
Ann Nicol
Leicestershire Museums Service
(students on the course)

It would be a worthwhile objective to document Museum holdings of species designated as endangered within the EC, though not all these species are at similar risk on a world scale. It is also feasible to 'adopt' a species whose habitat is close at hand, and to gather information on its autecology or reproductive biology. Annex 3 includes such familiar plants as the Horned Poppy, *Glaucium flavum*, the Sea Holly, *Eryngium maritimum* and the Box, *Buxus sempervirens*. Annex 2 contains the Ghost Orchid, *Epipogium aphyllum*, and Annex 1 mentions the Bog Orchid, *Hammarbya paludosa* and Slender Cotton-grass, *Eriophorum gracile*. One could consider mounting a travelling exhibition which contained examples from these lists. The Liverpool Museum's exhibition 'Wildlife, the Law and You' had a successful tour promoting the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

In the Press

Plants and the proposed EC Habitats Directive

The proposed **Habitats Directive**, a draft of which was published by the European Commission in 1988, is 'potentially one of the most important legal instruments ever written for the conservation of plants'. These are the views of a Plantlife report published by the WWF and the RSPB in April 1990. But what are the implications for Natural History curators?

In the 'Supplementary Annexes' to the proposal for a Habitats Directive, which were published in March of this year, lists are presented of plant and animal species whose habitats are threatened in the European Community (Annex 1, which contains a separate list for the parts of Macaronesia which fall within the EC); of species of animals and plants which are threatened in the Community (Annex 2); and of plants and animals whose exploitation should be subject to a management plan (Annex 3). A list of natural and semi-natural habitats to be protected within the Community forms Annex 4.

The intention in publishing these lists is similar to that pursued by the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which designated 62 plant species as being given special protection. Subsequent reviews have added a further 31 species to this list, some of which feature in the EC lists. If collecting (for whatever purpose) is restricted or forbidden within the EC, specimens already in Museum collections acquire an enhanced value. There ought to be a presumption in favour of encouraging work on these specimens so as to avoid having to take further material from the wild.

These are simply draft proposals; there will be a lengthy period of consultation before legislation is finalised, and (as was the case with the Wildlife and Countryside Act) we can expect pressure groups to respond vigorously in their own defence. One thing is clear: European legislation will provide additional scope for Museum curators to justify projects to conserve and document their collections. Perhaps we should also try to influence the content of this legislation, by making representations to the committee of the European Parliament which is considering these proposals. Is anyone interested in taking this further?

Copies of the Plantlife report (which has the same title as this article) can be obtained from Ian Hepburn at the RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy Beds. SG19 2DL.

John Edmondson
Liverpool Museum

Curator (32:2) has a short piece on an inexpensive apparatus for degreasing skulls - in this case small mammal and bird skulls - by F J Jannett and J G Davies. It describes a boxed unit of 36 cells for the bulk handling of 36 skulls or parts of skulls in degreasing and washing liquids. Due care is taken of the data labels, which is vital with mass handling techniques of similar material like this; the whole apparatus lasts for several dozen applications and costs next to nothing.

In the same issue there is a fascinating paper by Karen Wonders of the Department of Art History, Uppsala University, Sweden, on the progress of taxidermy through various phases of development: